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SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: SCENE SETTER FOR SALAH AD DIN PROVINCE

11. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable.

12. (SBU) INTRODUCTION. Salah ad Din province, best known as Saddam's homeland and the Sunni heartland of Iraq, is struggling to find a new political identity and economic vigor in a free Iraq. Believing themselves to suffer unfairly from assumed associations with the past regime and to be victims of unfair de-Baathification policies, SaD residents are down in but not out of the political process. They still see themselves as the best educated and most experienced leaders in Iraq and have entered a "wait and see" mode to determine how they will be incorporated in the current political process.

13. (SBU) Of the province's estimated 1.2 million residents, most are Sunnis living in the principal cities of Tikrit, Bayji, and Samarra. There are two Shia enclaves in the southeast in Balad and ad Dujel and a Kurdish and Turkoman area in the northeast around al Tuz. With the dismantling of the former regime's security apparatus and the de-Baathification policies in place, unemployment in the province has soared, and the overall economic situation is worsening. Although the province has great agricultural potential, it has not been tapped.

14. (SBU) The provincial government's executive and legislative branches are active, but do not have well defined roles or a clear separation of power. With SaD's vote against the constitution and the Sunni boycott of the previous election, the provincial government is neither representative nor respected. The security situation is worsening and remains the single greatest obstacle to development. Although the provincial government and the Iraqi security forces cooperate well with the Coalition Forces, the environment is generally non-permissive. END INTRODUCTION.

Governance, Rule of Law, and the Political Situation

15. (SBU) Democratic political structures are nascent in SaD. Democratic principals and processes, with safeguards and checks and balances in the system, have not been fully embraced, resulting in the legislative branch's assumption of many executive branch powers, such as contracting and project execution. While active, the executive branch does not have a clear role or a defined mandate. As the national constitution does little to clarify the duties and responsibilities of each branch and of elected officials, it is largely left to the officials themselves to define their offices. This tips power into the hand of the more ruthless players who are able to assemble power by intimidation, and

reinforces tribal and religious power bases of elected officials. The Directorates General (DGs) of the ministries are functioning, but decentralization has caused confusion, mismanagement, and inefficiency. Many of the DGs are also demoralized by the confusion within the provincial government that results in misuse or non-use of their experience and training. The judicial branch, particularly the civil court system, is largely functional, but suffers from over-crowded jails, inefficient courtroom procedures, and insufficient security for judges. In addition, corruption is commonplace and expected.

¶6. (SBU) Political parties lack structure and are largely personality driven. Religious sheikhs and tribal leaders maintain significant influence. Many of the province's former elites feel marginalized in the national political process, and this sense of disaffection has aided many insurgent elements in the province.

¶7. (SBU) The leadership of the provincial government cooperates well, if sometime superficially, with the USG. Defining the independent roles of each branch of the provincial government, increasing transparency and accountability, and helping make elected leaders answerable to their constituents are the USG's principal governance objectives in SaD.

The Economic Situation

¶8. (SBU) Salah ad Din's once strong, but state-dependent economy is in decline. Deteriorating infrastructure,

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inadequate banking systems, corruption, and a non-permissive legal framework have stifled both state-owned and private businesses. Unemployment province-wide is an estimated 40 percent and reaches as high as 70 percent in some cities. The once functional state-owned businesses are failing due to inefficiency and lack of necessary inputs, and the private industries do not have access to capital markets. The provincial government's institution of a fuel rationing system based on gas coupons, in cooperation with the GOI, recently provided a boost to the economy, particularly the agricultural sector where irrigation is managed through fuel-driven pumps. This new system appears to have largely alleviated the previous gas shortages that resulted from extensive black market operations.

¶9. (SBU) SaD's agricultural sector has great potential, but suffers from aging irrigation equipment as well as production and distribution problems. According to local contacts, when the United Nations' Oil-for-Food Program began in the mid-nineties, Saddam discouraged food production, and agriculture production and development slowed significantly. The beneficiaries of the former regime's centrally-planned economy, many SaD residents see the province's economic development coming through state-owned companies, rather than through agricultural development or private businesses.

¶10. (SBU) To date the USG and Coalition Forces have allocated over USD 975 million in reconstruction projects, principally in infrastructure, in SaD; however, the impact on the infrastructure and on the economy has not been significant. Encouraging growth in the agricultural and private business sectors, improving the business climate, and assisting establishment of a functional and sustainable infrastructure are the USG's principal economic objectives in the province.

The Security Situation

¶11. (SBU) The single greatest obstacle to political reform and economic growth is the poor security situation.

Continued attacks on Iraqi security forces (ISF) and targeted assassinations and kidnappings of provincial leaders hamper efforts to increase participation in governance and improve business opportunities. The Iraqi Army maintains a relatively good reputation throughout the province, while the Iraqi police are considered corrupt and biased. Latent tensions, unemployment, and political frustration have contributed to insurgent activities in SaD. Although both the Iraqi police and army cooperate well with the Coalition Forces, the environment remains generally non-permissive.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) The reach of the central government to the provinces is not strong or uniform. This is compounded by the fact that the authorities and responsibilities of the provinces have not yet been defined adequately, and therefore there is uncertainty over roles and direction at the provincial level. As such, governance, economic, and security issues in SaD may not unfold as the central government anticipates. This cable establishes a baseline assessment for where SaD is at present. Septel reporting will analyze the situation and developments in these sectors in more detail. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) For additional reporting from PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din, please see our SIPRNET Reporting Blog:
<http://blogs.csp.sgov.gov/blojsom/blog/salahaddin/>.

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